

TEARS FOR THE INNER AND MIDDLE TEMPLE

---

"Lovely and pleasant in their lives"..... those words from one of the world's great laments wind sadly through my heart as I muse upon the sorrow of the Temple's burning. Dear place, so lovely everywhere and so beloved - the age-old gardens, with their tranquil turf might have been a prototype for the mediaeval poet when he sang of the heavenly Jerusalem "Thy gardens and thy gallant walks continually are green" - the quiet courts, haunt of the lawyers and Lamb and Dickens, with fountain, trees, cloisters, odd steps, posts, lanes and birds, hopping and happy, were so dear that to a child ( for children and poets are close akin) they seemed visible proof of the hymn's assertion "Pleasant are thy courts below". Pleasant they were, those Halls and Courts of the Inner and Middle Temple. But loveliest of all, dearest of all, was the Temple Church, where in lowly effigy the stern Templar Knights lay in uneasy sleep on the floor their mail-clad feet once walked - steel upon stone sending out weapon sounds to search the grim shadows of the Round Church and to pierce the peace of the long sun shafts of the choir.

Gone! Only the memories of all it was still float like  
the beams and <sup>motes</sup> ~~not~~ in those sun shafts that I used to know  
so well athwart the Church.



"Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions".....That refrain again, and with it a strange whimsical smile flitting through my tears. "In their death they were not divided". Why, yes, that is true too of the Inner and Middle Temple, those foundations whose emblems are the flying horse and the lamb. The fancy would have pleased Charles Lamb- the Temple's uncanonised and whimsical saint - unsurpassed in gentleness and wit. How tenderly he would have developed the theme, he who wrote once <sup>and their Church.</sup> and for all about the old Benchers./ But he, like the Benchers ~~and their Church~~ was gathered out of time into eternity long ago. That essay will never be written. Only the Bible words remain to make an epitaph upon Lamb and the Temple he loved. "They were lovely and pleasant". A heavenly, George Herbertish tenderness and tranquillity suffuse my earliest recollections of the summer Sunday mornings when my Father would take my Mother and us children to the Temple Church. There would be a walk in the early brightness from our house to Sydenham Hill Station past part of the old Dulwich Wood, and then the railway with its green slopes alight with marguerites. A rattly journey in an old Chatham and Dover train that emerged from the tunnel with an un-Sabbatical, most week-day coating of smuts and steam. Then another walk from St. Paul's Station along Fleet Street or the Embankment, quiet in the sunlight, to that grandly sombre portico of the Temple Church, where the rounded arch-heads



and dog-tooth mouldings set forth to the centuries the Norman spirit in action. But we seldom lingered in the warrior world of the Round Church ( though we looked with eager romance at the cross-legged effigies of the knights) because my Father had always obtained orders from a Benchman for our admittance to the Choir. Thither we were ushered by a begowned verger, and then separated, according to the custom of the place, my Father to sit with the men in the centre, my Mother and ourselves in the high pews at the side. Once or twice on very crowded days we had chairs in the aisle. To a child this was charming, for one could make a study of the tiles in the floor during the prayers. How I loved them ! Long afterwards I learnt they were modern specimens of their kind and poor at that. But bad or good, I continued to cherish them for their various emblems and most of all for the two knights on one horse typifying the poverty of the Templars. Still, I preferred the side pews, with their carved ends, high-backed narrow seats, breast-level book rest, stacked with solid leather volumes edge to edge, and the hinge-dropped little kneelers below for one's comfort during devotions. When I, being small, sat or knelt I saw nothing but pew, books, roof and pulpit, but when I stood I could survey the whole tranquil scene. Dean Vaughan - for those were his days - with his fine, calm face near the Altar; Dr. Hopkins, beaming and voluminous in white surplice and coloured hood in the organ loft, his hands deftly moving over the keys with their



quarter tones that Purcell once touched; the choir ranged in their rising side-banked pews beneath. I could see too, the congregation of fine-faced men, learned, keen, upright, and my Father's face among them, finer than any, I still think. He loved the music as much as I did. It was worth loving. Not that it was what would be chosen today. There was no Tudor austerity, no modern asperity, about it. The anthems I best remember were by Mendelssohn, Spohr and Wesley; the hymn tunes were often by Dykes, they flowed with melody as the land of Canaan flowed with milk and honey. But then honey and milk are the natural food of children. And in any case the rendering of these works was so beautiful, so full of faith in the spiritual realities they pictured, that it left an indelible memory of sunny piety. Mendelssohn's "Hear my prayer" with its dove-~~like~~ smooth melody to carry the words "O for the wings of a dove" Spohr's limpid stream of melody in "As pants the heart for cooling streams" and -most loved of all because the finest - Wesley's noble setting of "The wilderness and the solitary place". My pen falters over the words, for then the wilderness seemed so far and scriptural - now it is so near and present.....but the promise of consolation following remains to comfort one like the streams in the desert..."and sorrow and sighing shall flee away"....

And in the silence of the prayers, or as background to the preacher's voice, I would hear all the time coming through the



the open windows the chirping of sparrows - the sparrows whom Christ loved - their little voices lifting cheerfully as they went about their business.

Some years later time had wrought its changes. Canon Ainger with his mane of white hair and strangely vital eyes reigned in the place of Dean Vaughan, and Dr. Walford Davies young and passionately eloquent in music had succeeded the serene Dr. Hopkins. I, by then a young girl, used to betake myself to the afternoon services. Sunday after Sunday I would seek my usual place on the Middle Temple side, and feel indeed as if this earthly Temple of such beauty were a portico to the region of heavenly bliss. Yet strangely enough, along with the radiant peace pervading the Early English Choir, with its calmly spacious windows and exquisite shafted columns of grey Purbeck marble shining in the light, I became more and more conscious of the dark mystery of the Round Church and its iron restlessness. There in effigy slept the Templars, grim in their armour, legs crossed, visors up showing their fierce faces. Greatest of them all, the Earl Marischall, William of Pembroke, he whom even his enemies trusted, whose battle-cry was "Victory or Paradise". Surely his deeds deserved sound sleep ! But I could never feel he slept. Noble as he was, he had robbed Church lands in Ireland and been accused after his death by the Irish Bishop who, standing beside his tomb and before the young King, Henry III, had in this very Round Church cursed him with



a curse that lay long upon his lands, working violence to their possessor. If the Earl Marischal could not rest, how should other knights have sweeter repose - men turbulent, steeped in their occult lore and saturate with pride? No, restless they were and unsleeping even in effigy. Most of all I grew aware of the restlessness of him who had no monument and no sepulchre; Brother Walter le Bachelier, walled up and starved to death in the tiny cell up the staircase and with its window slit looking into the church to give him benefit of clergy. Many a time in winter twilights I almost fancied I saw his face, frenzied, white and ever weaker, looking forth from the shadows upon the world he had left. What had been his crime against his Order? None knows; the Templars kept their secrets well.

Only at Christmas the restless ghosts fall into peace. Then, with the holly and ivy spread around their tombs, and the white-surpliced choir beside singing carols of the Christ-child tranquillity and tenderness suffused the Round Church. What a place for music! Who that heard it can forget the exquisite resonance of the Round for unaccompanied voices, and the delicate edge upon the parts like the fine cutting of stone. To this day I always think in terms of the Temple sound of "The Holly and the Ivy", with its refrain of the "rising of the sun and the running of the deer" and - lovelier still - of Pearsall's setting of "In dulci jubilo", where the verse picturing the dear City of God was a vision so beautiful that as one almost saw as well as heard it,



while the infinite wistfulness of the refrain "O that we were there".... rings in one's heart for ever.

For music to be given in the Round Church was exceptional, but services held in the Choir were just as beautiful. This part of the building had its own resonance too, and once even I heard its very note - a thrilling liquid overtone springing forth from the roof in response to the perfect chord held by the human voices beneath, I think it was A flat - but dare not assert that now.

Lovely as voices and vaulted roof were the tones of the organ. It stood to other organs in the same relation as a perfect Stradivarius to other violins. Father Smith's pipes had something unique I think, in their quality. At least their sound was such as I never heard elsewhere. Purcell had heard them once, and had played that very instrument in the battle of the organs, when Father Smith and Renatus Harris contended for the palm. But by now the organ had been rebuilt; the quarter tones were gone, and electric touches took the place of the ordinary stops. Thus the organ was almost as sensitive as a string quartet, and with such an instrument, such a choir and such a musician as Walford Davies the Temple's music became doubly famous. To me all services were beautiful. For the Psalms and Canticles alone I would gladly have travelled more miles and sat through more sermons than I did to hear them. Whether the sermons to which I listened were without spiritual wings, or whether I was insensitive to words I hardly



know, but today I cannot recall a single thing said in the pulpit by the Master or the Reader, though I remember how perfectly Canon Ainger read the Lessons. Still I did at least go to the ordinary services.

It was thus I first heard all Wesley's great anthems, from the exquisitely lovely setting of "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace" to the terrific splendours of "Ascribe unto the Lord". With what fury Walford Davies interpreted the passage about the gods of the heathen ! and how fine his extempore introductions always were to anything by Wesley. It was here I first learnt to love the purity of "Lord, for Thy tender mercies' sake" by Farrant, the simplicity of anthems by Eccard and Arcadelt, the German Chorals, and - still dearer to me - such grand old hymn tunes as "Wareham" and "Hanover". The in and out voluntaries were also a continual delight. When in the mood to play, Walford Davies would interpret Bach's D minor Toccata and Fugue with an almost terrifying grandeur. It might not have been - indeed it hardly would have been - orthodox Bach, but it had something Michael Angelesque and Miltonic that was unforgettable. So, in another way, had his interpretations of the Adagio from Beethoven's Fourth Symphony, the Theme from the B flat Trio Op. 97, and the slow movement of the Ninth Symphony. Looking back I can see it was his magnificent command of rhythm and phrasing that gave his playing its superlative quality. His mastery of the dotted note, ( an almost universal stumbling-block today) was absolute. Perhaps the supreme example of this was in his playing



of the orchestral portions of Handel's "I know that my Redeemer liveth". To hear Capel Dixon, one of the finest solo boys the Temple ever produced, sing this accompanied by Walford Davies was more satisfying than any other performance of this I ever heard. Serene, golden E major music, poised as perfectly as the Easter Sunday sun shafts. That Walford Davies loved Handel beyond others could be felt by his unforgettable renderings of undying music. He - as no one else I ever heard - imparted majesty to the "Hallelujah" Chorus, not because he made the Hallelujahs louder, faster, more tumultuous than other musicians ( he did not ) but because he insensibly slowed, broadened, and softened on its first entry what I may call the second subject that matchless phrase to which Handel set the words "The kingdom of this world has become the Kingdom of our God". One of the supreme moments in music was interpreted with supreme beauty. Now I come to think of it, this vision of the dear City of God, the longing for His Kingdom, were inextricably<sup>inter</sup> woven with the Temple music under Walford Davies. When he gave his beloved movement from the Requiem by Brahms, "How lovely is Thy dwelling-place", it was with an urgency of desire that seemed to lift one almost into the heavenly precincts.

On the third Sunday afternoon of each month the sermon would be abrogated in favour of an oratorio or cantata. On these occasions the church was crowded with a congregation from far and near, which contained many people distinguished in Law, politics, science and the arts. Among the faces I recall were those



of Mr. Muir Mackenzie, <sup>eminent in law</sup> ~~eminent in law~~, enthusiastic in music, and M. Zaleski, later Foreign Minister of Poland. There were also people who would never have entered a church under other ~~of~~ circumstances, and who referred to the musical service as "The Concert". Such an attitude seems painful to the clergy in general. It probably makes them feel as if music were a rival to be suppressed, though they would hardly admit such an idea to themselves. But at that time the Temple gladly opened its services to all who wished to come, and all might enter to participate in things spiritual for a while, if they would. This was specially the case when music by J. S. Bach was given. The exquisite cantatas, "O Light everlasting", "Abide with us", "God's time is best" were like a spiritual offering. The Christmas Oratorio lay at the springs of the Christian year; Most searching of all was the yearly performance of St. Matthew Passion Music. A performance with only the organ instead of Bach's Orchestra to support the voices naturally lost in colour but it gained in unity of interpretation and personal eloquence of expressions, while the surroundings of the beautiful church enhanced the awareness of the profound and high regions which the music traversed. It was at the Temple in a performance of the St. Matthew Passion music that once for a moment I stepped from Time into Eternity and had a glimpse of its nature. It was as if round a rock one passed from a tearing wind straight into infinite calm. The remembrance has comforted me ever since.



I know now why Plotinus thought great calm was the prelude for communion with the Divine. That silence beyond music was the loveliest thing I ever heard at the Temple.

In later years circumstances altered. The Temple became fashionable and I went less to it. I cannot be sure when was the last time. I think it was a Memorial Service. Now I write these words as my memorial to the Temple. Its beauty and serenity have perished in the flames lit by Nazi hatred as surely as the Grand Master of the Templars, Jacques de Molay, perished at the stake, on the Isle de France centuries ago by order of the French King, Philippe le Bel, and the Pope. Dying De Molay called upon them to meet him within the year before the Judgment Seat of God. His summons was fulfilled.... What will follow the burning of the Templars' Church? None yet knows. We only know that the beauty of this building, of the Round Church, whose shape was the symbol of Eternity, has itself been gathered into Eternity.